IRON president and INL chief information officer Brent Stacey (left) welcomes Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter during an Oct. 9 news conference announcing the official lighting of the Idaho Regional Optical Network.

Idaho connects to the national high-performance computer network

by John Walsh, *INL Communications*

With a flick of a switch, Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter launched the Idaho Regional Optical Network (IRON) GigaPoP connection in Boise Oct. 9. This GigaPoP is Idaho's connection to the nation's ultra high-speed research computer network -- the National Lambda Rail.

IRON connects state government, research institutions, education and health care facilities across Idaho. More importantly, it enables Idaho researchers to collaborate on regional, national and international research projects by providing the foundation to link Idaho to Internet2 and the National Lambda Rail. These are the high-speed national computer network infrastructures that run over fiber-optic lines connecting the United States from coast to coast and internationally including Europe, Asia, Central and South America.

"This is a truly momentous occasion for Idaho, opening the state to economic opportunities in all areas, but specifically in information and technology growth," said Gov. Otter. "Economic expansion comes, in part, by increasing the number of new commercial businesses that are created in technology parks where reliable, cost-effective, high-speed network connectivity is critical. IRON increases research and funding opportunities at universities and laboratories in Idaho. And a byproduct of the increase in research is additional jobs for Idahoans."

Governor Otter flips the switch on IRON connecting Idaho to the ultra high-speed national network.

IRON was initiated by Idaho National Laboratory and the state universities and incorporated in late 2007 as a 501(c) 3 public charity. Its charter associates are INL, the state of Idaho, Boise State University, Washington State University, the University of Idaho, Brigham Young University-Idaho and the Idaho Hospital Association.

Boise was selected as the IRON GigaPoP connection because the National Lambda Rail runs through the city. Additionally, Boise is a central location in the Pacific Northwest for redundant, diverse connections to other state and regional optical networks. IRON's backbone network will connect Moscow, Coeur d'Alene and Idaho Falls through Boise, Spokane, Portland and Seattle.

A GigaPoP is the term for a gigabit point-of-presence, and access point to the Internet, the network collaboration between universities and partners in industry and government to develop advanced Internet technologies and applications such as telemedicine and digital libraries.

The IRON GigaPoP connection in Boise was supported by Syringa Networks and Boise State University. Syringa Networks was founded by 12 rural local telephone companies to connect their communities to the rest of the world with broadband telecommunications services.

Greg Lowe, CEO of Syringa Networks, said, "Syringa Networks is excited to be hosting IRON's GigaPoP as it launches a new era of connectivity among its key customers. Syringa Networks' redundant and diverse fiber optic network is designed to provide the reliability and scalability needed for intensive multi-site computing and collaboration. We look forward to assisting IRON with its mission as a strategic partner."

Brent Stacey, IRON's president and INL's chief information officer, said, "The vision was to create a high-speed, cost-effective research and education fiber optic computer network infrastructure across Idaho, for Idaho. The collaboration and teamwork that transpired across Idaho's universities, research laboratories, state government, and the health care industry was nothing short of remarkable. IRON is an excellent example of our ability to work together at a grass-roots level to make a difference.

"Today, IRON is a reality for Idaho offering economical high-speed bandwidth to research, education, state government, and health care through a not-for-profit corporation. IRON's backbone does not yet cover all of Idaho, but it will. The current backbone (for the first time) connects northern, southwestern and southeastern Idaho to the IRON GigaPoP connection in Boise.Those with regional access to IRON's backbone through local

Governor Otter and Brad Jordon, IRON technical architect, watch as the Idaho Regional Optical Network comes on line.

providers now will have very fast access to the National Lambda Rail and Internet2; connecting Idaho to the digital world at speeds to which most of us did not have access, or could not afford."

Stacey said specific to Idaho National Laboratory, "World events are putting Idaho, INL and Idaho universities at the center of a nuclear renaissance. The intellectual contributions that Idaho will be able to make to this 'rebirth' of nuclear energy are dependent on a robust network infrastructure."

IRON provides the network bandwidth required for Idaho to compete for, attract and support new and existing research programs and facilities in nuclear energy, noted Stacey.

"For example, one of the requirements for hosting a National Science Foundation supercomputer center is having at least two connections to U.S. research networks," he said.

Visit the IRON website for more information.

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